

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: October 13, 2016

Agenda Item: Trumbull Creek Conservation Easement (R1)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

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Background:

FWP and The Trust for Public Land (TPL) negotiated two conservation easements with F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Co. – Haskill Basin (3,020 acres) which closed in February 2016 and Trumbull Creek (7,150 acres), which we are seeking final Commission approval. The Commission endorsed the Trumbull Creek project in May 2015. The appraised value of the conservation easement (approximately \$12.7 M) would be paid with \$6.5 M from the Forest Legacy Program, \$2 M from the Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Program, \$1 M in private foundation grants to TPL, and \$3.2 M in donated value by the landowner. The property provides winter range for mule deer, white-tailed deer and moose. It is rated Class 1 for terrestrial species richness and provides important habitat for a variety of Tier I species and includes 1.5 miles of South Canyon Creek which supports a population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. The property receives substantial levels of public use for year-round outdoor activities as well as access to Forest Service lands in the North Fork. Stoltze's willingness to sell a conservation easement offers a unique opportunity to conserve habitat and sustain high levels of public recreation.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

FWP held public scoping meetings in 2014 for both the Haskill Basin and Trumbull Creek projects. An EA was released for public comment from October 26th to November 22nd, 2015 and included a public hearing in Whitefish on November 9th. Two legal notices were published in four local newspapers, 161 notices were mailed to neighboring landowners and interested parties, and the EA was posted on the FWP webpage. FWP received 56 public comments from individuals and organizations. Twenty-nine of the comments supported, and none opposed the project. The remaining 27 comments, along with 15 people who expressed support for the project, identified questions, issues or concerns that are addressed in the decision notice. Most of these comments were directed toward the Haskill Basin conservation easement, but 13 specifically mentioned either Trumbull Creek or both conservation easements and of those 12 expressed strong support. The other comment asked about maintaining an existing trail and expressed concern for providing adequate parking.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Two alternatives were analyzed and considered in the EA: 1) Proposed Action: Purchase the Haskill and Trumbull Creek conservation easements and 2) No Action: Do not complete one or both proposed conservation easements. Under the Proposed Action, the properties would: continue to be sustainably managed for production of forest products; conserve important fish and wildlife habitat; and maintain a diverse array of public recreational opportunity. Under the No Action Alternative, no immediate changes would be likely since the conservation easement was designed to maintain current sustainable management practices and public access. However, given the value of this land and demand for residential development, it is likely the property would eventually be sold and developed with impacts to wildlife and public access.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP recommends the Commission approve the purchase of the Trumbull Creek conservation easement in order to conserve important wildlife habitats and maintain substantial public access.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the purchase of the Trumbull Creek conservation easement from F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Company.